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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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May 12, 1953

SUBJECT: Egypt

PLACE: U.S. Embassy, Egypt

PARTICIPANTS:

United States	Egypt
Honorable John Foster DULLES, Secretary of State	Colonel Abd Al Nasir
Honorable Douglas MacARTHUR II, State Department Counselor	Major Abdel Hakim Amir
Honorable Henry A. BYROADE, Assistant Secretary of State	Major Salah Salim
Lieutenant Colonel Stephen MEADE, United States Army	Wing Commander Abd Al Latif Baghdady
Ambassador Caffery	
Mr. G. Lewis Jones	
Mr. Howard Elting	
Mr. William Lakeland	

The Secretary opened the conversation by saying that he was delighted to see the representatives of the RCC and to have a chance to exchange views with them. The Secretary felt that he understood the Egyptian point of view better than when he had arrived, but that he still had much to learn. He would like to say a few words of general character.

The Secretary would like the RCC representatives to know that the US has a real enthusiasm for the new regime in Egypt which has done so much to introduce honesty into public life. The US would like to be of help in the work of the new regime, but, of course, it does not wish to intrude its help. The Secretary had a long talk with Mr. Black of the IBRD who told him that he was genuinely interested in helping Egypt with a loan. The Secretary was glad to hear this, because he felt that an international fund like the IBRD should be available to help deserving countries.

As he had

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As he had done to the Prime Minister the previous day, the Secretary said that there had been high-level meetings in Washington to decide where US financial aid could be best employed. It was impossible to help everybody and, consequently, it seemed wise to choose "a few key positions". Egypt is one of the countries "we would like to help with military supplies and equipment" because we feel that Egypt now has the leadership which could cause Egypt to set an example to the other Arab States, where there has been so much weakness during the past few decades.

The Secretary said that the Administration had asked Congress to appropriate economic assistance for the Middle East in a lump sum somewhat larger than that of last year and without specific separation between the Arab States and Israel. So far the reception of the Congress had been favorable.

The Secretary said that it was interesting to note that the Republican Administration does not owe the same degree of political debt as did the Democrats to Jewish groups.

The Secretary [illegible] that he thought the Washington situation was such that it could [illegible] to the improvement of US relations with all democratic countries. So far as Egypt is concerned, there was one thing to be cleared up -- the presence of the British forces in Egypt. The Secretary understood that the withdrawal of British forces was now assured in almost all respects. Only a few residual elements remained. It was now settled that the British troops will evacuate Egypt, and Egypt's sovereignty will be fully recognized.

What remains undecided is the question of custody -- the utilization -- the direction -- of the depots in the base which "are so important in the absence of other arrangements for area defense". The depots are a "material basis" for area defense, and from the US standpoint they form a vital part of the strategic picture in this part of the world. The depots must be well managed, and their contents must be available for use in Cyprus, Jordan, etc.

The US would like to see area defense established. The more the Secretary thought about MEDO the less well he thought it was adapted to meet the case. It involves too many non-area countries. The Egyptians, themselves, have proposed some form of area defense system.

In sum,

In sum, it is the US feeling that:

a. British troops should evacuate and Egyptian sovereignty should be fully restored.

b. The present mechanics for the defense of the area (i.e., the base) should not lapse even for an interim period.

It could not be denied that the armies of the Arab States are weak. The US thinks that the custody and direction of the depots should be retained, so that these can be used, even under present defense plans.

The Secretary said that, as he had told the Prime Minister yesterday, the US has no desire to back the UK in "imperialism" or "colonialism". The US wants to see Egypt free. The depots are, however, a complicating factor. They cannot be shifted. A way must be found to use the depots as a "backlog for strategic plans" for the time being until Egyptian leadership produces a group or association which will make the area safe. The US hopes that this will not take very long.

No country can stand alone. Even the US must participate in mutual defense groupings. An Association of American States helps to protect the Panama Canal. The Secretary said, "We beg you not to demand a degree of control over the actual supplies in the base which will handicap their usefulness for defense."

The Secretary said he would like to know the solution of the problem foreseen by the officers present.

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(Note: From this point it was extremely difficult to take notes because the officers (particularly Nasir) spoke in low voices. The following is only an approximation of the conversation.)

Nasir said that Egypt is faced with the problem of confidence. He thought that the objectives of the US and Egypt are the same; Egypt, too, would like to see the defense of the area organized. However, as long as British influence is in Egypt, there is a psychological block to setting up an area defense arrangement. The Egyptian people think of MEDO as a "perpetuation of occupation". The British want "technical control", but he assured the Secretary that if the British are "here under another name", the population would not cooperate. The population must be convinced - must have confidence.

The Secretary

The Secretary asked how long he thought it would take to work out a new organization - a couple of years? Nasir replied that "nobody" would now accept the statement that the UK can be genuine allies of the Arabs. The population of Egypt would think crazy anybody saying this.

The Secretary reminded Nasir that it would be a great thing to have the British forces leave Egypt. Would this not make a big difference?

Nasir replied that British influence must entirely disappear. The RCC must depend upon the cooperation of the people. The people would not cooperate for anything else.

The Secretary said that he understood very well that no government can be strong without the support of the people: by the same token, governments must influence the thinking of the people.

Nasir replied, "We can influence the people on every point except this."

The Secretary reminded Nasir that he would have a great success with the withdrawal of the British forces - the greatest success any government of Egypt had ever had in time of peace. As he had said earlier, it was within the grasp of Egypt to have other successes equally notable in other spheres (economic, social, etc.). It was difficult for him to understand how these successes must depend on the total elimination of any British influence. Would British civilians in the base really represent influence? It seemed incredible that Egypt would throw away these successes on such a point.

Nasir said that under the UK ideas Egypt can have "overall control of the base" but that the UK wants "technical control". (The officer outlined the difficulties of this from the point of view of Egypt.)

The Secretary attempted to make a comparison with the "technical control" which the Ford Motor Company has over its factory representative abroad. He said this in no way infringed sovereignty. The company could order the parts it wished and export them where they wished. The base was an analogy to this commercial arrangement.

Nasir said with regard to parts and supplies moving in and out of the base that, "We want the base to be like a bank; the British can put in, and they can take out."

The Secretary

The Secretary said, "Let's be more specific. What do you mean by control? How do you envisage Egyptian control?"

Nasir, in a low voice, said that Egyptians could be trained to do everything the British are now doing.

The Secretary said that it would be "unreasonable and unfortunate" for Egypt to ask for such a degree of control in the absence of any going defense organization. The depots contain vast supplies. The US hopes Egypt will lead the Arab States into a new area defense system (not MEDO, since this was out of date) which, when it is achieved, will find the material in the depots available to it.

Nasir said that Egypt could and would maintain the depots for use at all times.

The Secretary said the US would like to see them maintained until a new organization is available. What the US feared was that a "dead-hand would freeze the equipment in the base for a couple of years." The base must be a living organism with material moving in and out; it was not dead storage. At this juncture of world affairs no one could afford dead storage.

Mr. Byroade said that he had a question about exports from the base. Was he correct in believing that the Egyptians wanted to be in the military communication channel through which orders regarding the supplies would move?

The gist of the Egyptian reply was that they did not have exactly this in mind.

Mr. MacArthur inquired whether the British know that it is the Egyptian idea that they will be free to ship supplies anywhere at any time.

The gist of the Egyptian reply was that the British had been told.

Mr. Byroade said it was difficult for him to understand how the question of sovereignty could be affected by the movement of direct telegrams regarding supplies from the UK to the base.

The Secretary said that the Ford Motor Company did not communicate its orders through the Egyptian Foreign Office.

Mr. MacArthur

Mr. MacArthur recapitulated. He said that the Egyptians had said the UK would be free to move the stuff where and when it likes, and that after evacuation starts, Egypt will be ready to start planning. The UK has a real public opinion problem of its own. Can the UK say that Egypt has agreed to the free movement of supplies in and out of the base? The Egyptians answered "yes". Mr. MacArthur then inquired whether the UK could say that Egypt will be prepared after evacuation starts to undertake area defense planning with the UK. The Egyptian answer was that this would be very difficult for Egyptian public opinion which would see in this only a disguised form of the hated joint defense.

Mr. Byroade said that if Egypt has agreed not to stop orders, would Egypt be content to have copies of the orders sent from the UK to the base?

Nasir said that what the Egyptians want is to run the base with Egyptians as soon as Egyptians are in a position to take over. He hoped that this would be in a short period. Acceptance of this idea by the UK would give the UK the friendship of Egypt and the entire Arab world.

Major Salah Salim said that in the course of the negotiations they had asked whether the UK would be prepared to have Egyptian technicians run the base. The British had replied, "meaning forever", they could have only British control over British stores so long as British stores remained in the base.

Mr. Byroade said that the British might want to send equipment and supplies to Iran. Egypt might not want this to happen. He asked how Egypt could assure "all of us" that the base would work as before until a defense set-up is ready.

Nasir replied, "What can we do except promise?"

The Secretary said that the Egyptian ideas were obscure on this point. He then read from the Egyptian draft terms of reference for the Base Committee (Embassy's despatch No. 2367 dated May 7, 1953). He assumed that Egypt accepted the warehouse idea, but in the event Iran was invaded the goods would have to move. The stores in the base are not like in the vaults of a bank. The point is movement.

Mr. Byroade inquired whether the Egyptians would have any objection to the British bringing in replacement stores.

Nasir

Nasir replied that the British were free to maintain the present level of stores in the base, but if there was any increase in this level, the Egyptian Government would wish to be consulted.

Byroade said that it seemed to him that there was sufficient area of agreement to make the problem between Egypt and the UK really one of finding words to express ideas.

The Secretary said he was very happy to have this talk.

Nasir said that he could assure the Secretary that Egypt wanted the base to be ready and workable.

Colonel Meade expressed the opinion that, "It all boils down to where the orders come from" and asked whether Nasir agreed.

Nasir replied that this was one point; the other point dealt with the duration of the presence of British technicians. Egypt must know the time limit "when all British will be gone".

Colonel Meade said that as a military man he disagreed with this idea. He could not see how Egypt could object to British ordnance supervisors. In American bases abroad, Americans are always there. It was hard for him to see how the population could object to these people. Once the British forces had moved, the volatile emotion of the people might disappear.

(Note: Several discursive trends of thought appeared at this point and could not be recorded.)

Asked regarding the status of the British technicians, Salah Salim replied that they could be a team of assistants attached to the British Military Attache in Cairo. Replying to a question by Colonel Meade, Salem said that Egypt has given full assurance that such a team could go down to visit the base at any time.

Nasir reiterated the point that Egypt did not want any British technicians in the base as soon as possible.

The Secretary asked, "How can we get the talks going again? The situation is dangerous." Nasir replied, "By getting the British to agree to the Egyptian point of view." Salah Salim said that he did not think the British would agree.

Nasir,

Nasir, in reply to a question, made it clear that as he viewed the channel of communication regarding the disposition of supplies in the base, it would run from the British War Office to the British Military Attache, Cairo, and thence to the Egyptian War Office. He said the orders must not go directly to the base.

The Secretary said that he had found the talk interesting and helpful. He looked forward to seeing the same group at dinner at the Embassy that evening.

Nasir agreed that they would talk that evening and remarked that Egypt is ready to put some teeth in the Arab League Collective Security Pact. He said, "We all want action."

The meeting broke up.